

The Cleverness of Cardillac

By
ROBERT BARR

Synopsis of Chapters Already Published

Victor De Cardillac, a hot-headed, impetuous youth of Gascony, goes to Paris to seek his fortune, leaving a letter from Charles d'Albert de Luynes, favorite of young King Louis XIII and chief minister and dictator of France, to the king.

CHAPTER I (Cont'd.)

"YOU but voice the general opinion," replied the old man complacently, "but those who hold that opinion do not know De Luynes. He has decided that there shall be no civil war; he holds with Sully the belief that France's salvation rests with the plow and the cow. For the first time in the history of France there comes to the head of its government a man with the intellect and knowledge of a peasant, who nevertheless knows every twist and turn of nobility's mind—of the minds of those who have hitherto ruled this kingdom. He plays politics as he would play a game of chess, with the broad lands of France for his chessboard. He regards the peasants, quite rightly, as producers; he regards the nobles, and quite rightly, too, as consumers. His theory is that France needs but tranquillity to become prosperous. For barely three months he has been in the saddle, and what already is the condition of affairs? All over France the nobles of D'Epemont in Loche, are hemmed up in this fortress or that, each with his handful of men. They cannot spend money, even if they had millions at their disposal, for it is only in Paris that fortunes are lost or won in a day. In France, then, peasants are producing wealth which nobles cannot spend. It needs only a few years of this condition, and France becomes the most wealthy and prosperous country in the world."

"A civil war will soon dissipate the prosperity and the wealth."

"You speak truly, but, as I told you, Luynes has determined there shall be no civil war."

"How can one man, and that man, as you admit, peasant-born, be assured that civil war will not break out?" cried Cardillac, with some impatience. "The aristocracy for centuries have been the governing body, just as the peasants have been the working body of the state. It is never the peasants who bring about a civil war. They, poor wretches, are ever content if allowed to till their lands in peace, even though the exactions of the tax-gatherer become almost unbearable. It is always some proud and rebellious noble who lights the torch of civil war, and the unhappy peasant, who is but a slave, must perforce follow to victory, or to destruction, as the case may be."

"Sir, it astonishes me that one who can speak so sanely of the causes of turbulence should yet possess a mind so biased by the prejudice of his class to give proper weight to the speech-making change that has taken place in the government. Your under-estimate of M. de Luynes, your apparent lack of sufficient foresight to appreciate what will happen with a peasant in supreme power, your contempt for the hardy working class from which he springs, and this inappreciative habit of mind being common to the whole nobility of France, M. de Luynes is thus placed in a position exactly the opportunity he requires. All he needs in addition is time. Every day that passes strengthens him, and when the aristocracy has awakened to his error Charles d'Albert de Luynes will be in a position to crush every member of it back into the ranks of the proletariat from which the ancestors of the aristocracy originally sprung, if he chooses to do so."

"Well, he has his work cut out for him," said Cardillac, with an incredulous smile. "and you seem to forget that while Charles d'Albert de Luynes, may, and doubtless will, inherit the crown of France, he has not inherited the crown of France, even though, for the moment, the queen-mother is his prisoner."

"The crown of France," said the elder solemnly, bowing his gray head at the mention of the regina, "rests on the head of its rightful possessor, Louis XIII, whom God preserve, who in two months time will be seventeen years old, and is infirm in body, and whose mind is what M. de Luynes has made it. For a dozen years De Luynes has been his constant companion, his only playmate, the one person on earth who has invariably been kind to him, and who was furthermore appointed, Henri IV, whose memory young Louis reveres."

"The crown, you say?" he could the for M. de Luynes than where it is. If it were offered to him, he would refuse it as an act of strong man Caesar did. No, the safety of the aristocracy lies in the ambition of Charles d'Albert de Luynes. The stupidity of the nobles would cause their downfall, were it not for M. de Luynes' determination to leave the ranks of the peasantry and join the ranks of the aristocracy. He will found a house able to hold up its head among the proudest seigneurs of France."

Cardillac laughed scornfully, which seemed to irritate his elderly, loquacious friend.

"Look you, young sir, De Luynes is betrothed to the daughter of the Duc de Montbazou, one of the heiresses of France, whose father is among the few who guess in what direction the wind is blowing. The king has promised De Luynes the estate of Maille, on the Loire, seven miles below Tours, an estate which surrounds the most noble feudal castle in France. Laugh now, my Gascon lad."

"I hope you do not use the word Gascony otherwise than as a term of compliment and honor," said the young man with some asperity.

"No, no, no," responded the elder in haste.

"In like manner, when I employ the word Provencal, it is to bestow upon my phrase the quality of authority."

The old gentleman bowed profoundly. "It requires, then, the vivid imagination of a Provencal poet to see anything of stability in the position of Charles d'Albert de Luynes. The place he occupies was produced by a monk, and is supported by a priest. Of the former—twins rulers of France, one is in the grave, the other is a cell. What a monster has done, a monster that, by the sword, and it is the fashion of prisoners to set the jailer free."

The elder set his hand lightly on the younger's shoulder with a gesture that was fatherly.

"My eloquent lad," he said, "Gascony has produced poets which rival those of France."

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of Provence. You and I are of the south, and understand each other, yet find it difficult to convey to you a true comprehension of the case. M. de Luynes has put no one in prison."

"You hold me gullible, indeed," cried the young man angrily, shaking the hand from his shoulder. "All France knows that Marie de Medici, the queen-mother, has been imprisoned in Blois this two months past."

"You have at best but a regency—a holding in trust of what rightfully belonged to her son—and this she clung long after its true purpose was past. Marie de Medici has made no protest against her change of residence, and, indeed, why should she? Blois is a delectable place, and what of the most charming provinces in France, and the chateau, as I have hinted, is even more than the Palace of the Louvre."

"If what you say is true," commented Cardillac, "why, then, all these military preparations by De Luynes, which you boasted of while since? Why is an army stationed at Blois and there to be?"

The elder man shrugged his shoulders. "Yes, and still another, that I have not mentioned, ready to pounce on D'Epemont the moment he quits his shelter at Loche. All this is simply M. de Luynes' precautions taken against disturbance—precautions rendered necessary by the fact that other besides yourself may imagine the Queen a prisoner."

"If such a delusion should cause activity among the Queen's partisans, we on our part must be ready to convince them of their error by annihilating them. Our good-will toward Marie de Medici is shown by our generous conduct to her. See what the Queen, England did thirty years ago to another Mary, she of the Scots, whose head rolled from the block. She was a real Queen, while Marie de Medici was merely a usurper. Oh, no, M. de Cardillac, there is no Queen imprisoned in France. Indeed, the remarkable thing about this change of government is that it is never the peasants who bring about a civil war. They, poor wretches, are ever content if allowed to till their lands in peace, even though the exactions of the tax-gatherer become almost unbearable. It is always some proud and rebellious noble who lights the torch of civil war, and the unhappy peasant, who is but a slave, must perforce follow to victory, or to destruction, as the case may be."

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you proof of their confidence in me. You seem of a doubting nature for one so young. Know, then, that I was given charge of the queen-mother's cavalcade from Paris to Blois, with a hundred soldiers under my command."

"Again, I have only your word for that," objected the unconvinced De Cardillac. "The other raised his eyebrows and spread out his hands with a little gesture of protest."

"I thought so clever a young man as you would credit me because the truth or falsity of what I have stated is so easily ascertained. The cavalcade departed from Paris on the last day of April, in the most open manner, and practically all Paris was there to see. It was a gala occasion, for the queen-mother was as unpopular as her favorite. My name is Treasurer. If you make inquiry, all your misgivings will be dispelled, for there are thousands who saw me riding at the head of my troop."

"But, aside from this public mission, M. de Luynes entrusted me with a private work of some delicacy, which, without attracting attention, to detach from the queen-mother's entourage the only capable lady in waiting she possessed, to deliver her to the care of the blood royal and to overtake the procession before my absence was detected. That I accomplished successfully, and M. de Luynes complimented me by saying, 'You are the only person he knew who could have done so.'"

"And what was the object of imprisoning a young lady in the cloister?" "The object was twofold. Those who surround the queen-mother are as stupid as herself; all of them are frivolous, most of them are beautiful, so there was no objection on the part of M. de Luynes that these butterfly nonentities should share the queen's exile, if you choose to call it so. Besides being a woman of whom I speak, besides being beautiful, is capable, and if your conjecture was true, you will easily see that we did not wish to place beside her one with ingenuously enough to help her to escape. The second reason was that this girl's father appears to be an important partisan of the queen-mother. She is his only daughter, on whom he very foolishly dotes, which is a mistake if a man wishes to take an active part in French politics. Until he learns the fate of his daughter we hold him helpless. He knows she is in our power, so he pretends affection for the new regime, and dare not openly take part with the supporters of Marie de Medici."

"And the truth of this later narrative I suppose I may learn by asking all Paris?" "No," returned the old man, with the utmost suavity. "It seemed impossible to anger him. 'No, this, as I told you, was a secret mission; but, if you have the courage to question him, I shall indicate to you a man who can authoritatively corroborate my statements.' 'Who is that man?' 'His name is M. Charles d'Albert de Luynes, whom you have expressed a desire to meet on terms of hostility. I shall be pleased to put you in a position to ask your questions at the point of the sword, if my former proviso you have the courage.'"

"Touche, at half past ten o'clock." "Where?" "If I am permitted to preface my answer by a few words of explanation, you will then comprehend more accurately than you do now the manner of my going to meet, and if this knowledge causes you to avoid the encounter for one, should be the last to dub you coward for I warn you M. de Luynes is probably the bravest man in Paris, as well as one of its most skillful swordsmen."

"Go on," commented Cardillac shortly. "Aside from this bravery and skill, which, if I understood rightly, you share with him, he possesses another quality which you hold in common. He is despondent of what is said to him by any except his immediate friends and confidantes. It is, therefore, his habit to learn for himself, at first hand, what the ever-changing opinions of Paris are regarding current events, and has, therefore, committed himself to a practice which all his friends who know of it, and the few, considered highly dangerous. Have you ever met M. de Luynes?"

"Never." "It would not much matter if you had, it is doubtful if you would recognize him in the circumstances at which I hint, for he disguises himself with some care. In one disguise or another he wanders about Paris alone at night, visiting taverns, wine shops, cafes, mixing with the people wherever men congregate, feeling thus with his own finger and thumb the pulse of Paris. Consequently no one has acquired such knowledge as M. de Luynes of the capital of France. Never in its history has Paris been so quiet as since my master came into power, and this tranquillity is not understood even by the police. But in what ever quarter of the city an insurrection is brewing, it is discovered that troops have silently taken possession of the street before the hour at which the outbreak was to have occurred, and more than one unfortunate wretch has been flung into the Seine because of the unjust suspicion that he has betrayed his comrades. You are of good family, a southerner, and therefore a man of honor, so I trust you with this secret in the utmost security, knowing you will not betray your confidence. M. de Luynes is as merciful as he is expert and brave with his weapon, so I know I am not sending you to your death. He will merely run you through the arm."

The Continuation of This Story Will Be Found in Tomorrow's Issue of The Times.

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